

Unapproved School Board Workshop Minutes

Dickinson Public Schools
Board Workshop

September 12, 2011; 6:25 p.m.
Board Room, Central Office

The Dickinson Public School Board held a Board workshop on September 12, 2011, at the Central Administration Office. Board members present were: President Kris Fehr, Dr. Rebecca Pitkin, Ms. Leslie Ross, Mr. Jason Hanson, and Dr. Morton Krieg. Administrators present were: Superintendent Douglas Sullivan, Assistant Superintendent Vince Reep, Mr. Calvin Dean, Mr. Shawn Leiss, Mr. Henry Mack, Mr. Del Quigley, Mr. Perry Braunagel, Mrs. Tamara Praus, Mr. Ron Dockter, Miss Sherry Libis, Mrs. Dorothy Martinson, and Mrs. Melanie Kathrein. Others present were: Ms. Dena Jacobson and Mrs. Twila Petersen.

President Fehr called the meeting to order at 6:25 p.m.

No action will be taken. Topics may become agenda items at future Board meetings.

Topics for discussion included:

Current Enrollment and Enrollment Trends

Implications for Facilities

History of Facility Construction and Current Building Capacity – Assistant Superintendent Reep distributed several handouts. The first group of handouts provided the current enrollment as of September 1, 2011, and the projected enrollment for the next five years. Another handout reflected how the enrollment numbers for the next four years will impact the classroom growth in the elementary schools. The historical construction and additions of the district school buildings was explained in another handout. Mr. Reep said there were 97 more students in the K-6 grades than one year ago. Using the information and the projections, by 2013-14, the K-5 school buildings may not have the necessary classroom space. The projected increase in enrollment may create larger than recommended classroom sizes. A final handout Mr. Reep provided was a scenario of changing each elementary school into a “sister school”. Each elementary school would have less grade levels by combining grades K-2 and grades 3-5. This would take the same amount of students in a particular grade and instead of the students enrolled at four schools, that grade would be distributed in two schools. This scenario would stabilize the number of sections of a grade. Following this path would be in alignment with the district’s focus on collaboration and Professional Learning Communities. The objective is to do what is best for the students.

Another discussion was to consider building an elementary school in the land owned by DPS. This would require working on a bond. Total time dedicated to constructing the new school would be a minimum of 3-4 years. Jan at Hulsing and Associates feels the 2014 price for construction could be approximately \$185 per square foot, or \$10 million to build a school. With a bond referendum, this may cost a taxpayer approximately \$140 per year on a \$240,000 house.

Student Reorganization – Mrs. Kathrein discussed how reorganizing the school buildings would improve Professional Learning Communities. When Berg began the transition to all sixth grade classes, there was opposition from teachers and the community. Once the teachers

Current Enrollment and Enrollment Trends (cont.)

were given the opportunity to collaborate, they realized the benefits and other teachers in other buildings wanted to have the same opportunity. Not all teachers are in favor of the idea.

Principal Quigley explained the challenges Lincoln is currently facing with a traveling music teacher, projections of large physical education classes, and special education classes doubling up or tripling up. Mr. Reep said if the district would decide to change the building organization to “sister schools”, the administration would need to relay information to the PAC members and community soon. Mrs. Fehr asked how the families would transport their school-age children if the district would change the organization. Superintendent Sullivan suggested the district look into between-building busing and/or strategic-location busing.

President Fehr asked what is best for the students and who would benefit from the “sister schools”. Mrs. Kathrein said if the buildings would be reorganized, it would not be a lot different in the daily schedule for the student. The teachers would have richer collaboration. Mrs. Fehr asked how this has affected sixth grade from being split up amongst four buildings to all being in one building. Mrs. Praus responded that teachers are now able to collaborate more effectively. Mr. Mack explained that if there are students all at the same age level, it would be more effective during intervention time, especially with behavioral issues. Now there is a wide range of ages at the elementary schools. Mr. Hanson asked what the implications would be for Title I funding if there was a building reorganization. Mrs. Martinson explained that the district identifies for DPI how many students in each school are eligible for free or reduced lunches. She explained the differences between school-wide funding and targeted funding. Mrs. Martinson explained when Berg went to only sixth graders, it did not affect the Title I funding. As a district, the configuration of the funding would change but it should balance out across the entire district. North Dakota was one of the states that lost Title I funding because low income families are leaving the state.

Faculty Housing - Superintendent Sullivan explained the projections for Dickinson growing from a population of 17,000 to 25,000 leaves uncertainties for the school district. There was an instance this school year where a candidate for a position was unable to find housing, but with the assistance of a district employee in locating a rental, the candidate was able to make housing arrangements and the district was able to hire the specialized teacher. The housing shortage could have an impact on future candidates. He felt it was also important to note that the oil economy could end abruptly if there are sanctions on fracking. Dr. Sullivan and Mr. Reep explained how Stanley, Williston, and New Town school districts built units or brought in modular units to provide housing for teachers. There was discussion regarding similar housing concerns with the city employees, county employees, and Dickinson State University. President Fehr asked for a discussion with the city, county and DSU and also a contact to Attorney Thune to discuss legal ramifications. She would like the Board to assess a two year projection on a housing project.

Other areas briefly discussed were the effect of large classroom sizes on students, the interim fund of \$8 million, a school construction loan, a new middle school, adding onto an elementary school, and a contingency plan. A Board member suggested advocating for the

Current Enrollment and Enrollment Trends (cont.)

“sister school” building reorganization and also having a contingency plan. Another Board member suggested a strategic plan. Having between-building busing may improve attendance at schools. An administrator suggested having conversations with staff about the reorganization of the schools and get their input. President Fehr said no decisions are being made at the workshop and suggested a public meeting for input. She suggested having it on the next Board workshop agenda. President Fehr thanked the group for the information and their participation.

Property Tax Initiative – Superintendent Sullivan addressed the group. The property tax initiative is on the June 2012 ballot. Dr. Sullivan provided a copy of the initiative to the group. If the initiative should pass, the revenue the district currently receives would have to come from different state sources. Ms. Ross noted that if the initiative passed, this would be approximately \$1 billion the state would lose in property taxes that would have to be taxed in other ways. There was discussion where the funds may possibly come from with some possible resources. Ms. Ross suggested the public may need to be educated on how public education is funded. President Fehr asked that this topic to be on the next Board workshop agenda and how the tax initiative will implicate Dickinson Public Schools.

School Board Self-evaluation Instrument – This topic was tabled until the October Board Workshop.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

Kris Fehr, Board President

Vince Reep, Business Manager

Twila Petersen, Secretary